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Honors Thesis—THEA 4018-001

12 April 2011

C.I.A.: College (In)Action: An Observation of the Female College Experience

In an interview with Hank Nuwer, David Mamet said, “I’ve always been interested in what’s happening about me—that’s what I write about.” This is the approach that I took when deciding on a topic for my thesis. I decided that I wanted to do a project that showed some of the many things that young women go through in their four years of college based off of my friends’ and my own experiences. With the help of my thesis advisor, Professor Funk, I decided to combine my theatre major with my broadcasting concentration and make a film. I had to use everything that I learned in the past four years to work on this project. In doing so I became the writer, director, editor, and producer. When I was short on people, I was also a back up camera operator, boom operator, and extra.

However, it was not the actual making of the movie that was the most challenging part of this project. The most challenging part of this project was writing the screenplay. While I have a lot of experience with the equipment, I do not have much experience writing. This is why most of my research was focused on helping me learn how to write about people, their relationships, and their dialogue. I used several sources including movies, a play, a TV show, critic reviews, books, and various other articles. The four main sources that I used were the play, *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* (1974); the movie, *The Women* (2008); the movie, *Grand Canyon* (1991); and the TV show, *The Office* (2005-). I studied *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* for David Mamet’s brilliant use of language and his depiction of young people trying to figure out their lives. I chose

to watch *The Women* because of the way that it shows strong women struggling with various issues in their lives and also their relationships with each other. I watched the *Grand Canyon* to study writing and the characters with their constant search for answers about why things happen. Finally, I stumbled upon *The Office* one day when I was having trouble giving my characters an outlet to express their inner thoughts, so I borrowed a little from its mockumentary style. All four of these as well as the accompanying research helped me monumentally in writing my script. I also kept a journal during the course of this academic year to document how I felt and what I learned from the time of writing the script to the last filming date.

The writer I studied for his incredible use of language is David Mamet. He was born in Illinois in 1947 and grew up in Chicago where many of his plays take place. He studied at Goddard College and Neighborhood Playhouse School of Theater. He began his theatrical career as an actor and director before achieving success as a writer in 1976 with *American Buffalo*, *The Duck Variations*, and *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*. It is this third play that I read multiple times while writing my script in order to study Mamet's natural and honest use of language. However, when it came to characters, I relied on my own experiences and relationships.

According to an article on Mamet on TheatreDatabase.com, "The most easily recognizable aspect of Mamet's style is his sparse, clipped dialogue (1)." However, my favorite description of Mamet's dialogue in *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* is by Matthew Konkel in his article "Review: Sexual Perversity in Chicago" posted in *Arts & Culture, Theatre, VITAL*. Konkel says, "The dialogue is delivered rapid fire, like a world champion wrestling match with extreme language that makes our ears blush. Conversations sparkle like sunlight through the trees because in a Mamet play—conversation is the star (2)." Konkel goes on to describe the entirety of the show by saying, "It goes down like a smooth but stiff drink (2)." I very much

enjoy the wording of these descriptions and I must say that I agree. The dialogue between the characters is how a lot of young people talk to each other with incomplete thoughts, miscommunications, and a whole lot of cursing.

Sexual Perversity in Chicago involves two men and two women in their twenties trying to figure out life with the opposite sex. Deborah is a fun, sweet young illustrator who is looking for the right man. She finds Danny, a nice, down-to-earth office worker who is looking for the right woman. Joan is Deborah's roommate who, even for her young age, is cynical about men and constantly projecting her issues on Deborah. Bernie is a friend and associate of Danny, who is quite the misogynist and constantly telling bizarre sex stories that may or may not be true. In the play, Deborah and Danny get together and quickly become a good-looking couple in a committed relationship. During the stages of this relationship, Mamet illustrates the influence that friendships have on each other and human beings' inability to effectively communicate.

Despite the various complexities of the English language, we still cannot seem to truly communicate with each other. In a reprinted quote from *Chicago Tribune Magazine* in American Conservatory Theatre's program production, Mamet says, "My plays are about people trying to become connected...But no one knows *how*. No one ever quite makes it (5)." This perfectly describes *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*. Between Bernie's inability to be respectful to women, Joan's inability to be kind to men, and Danny and Deborah's inability to really talk and listen to each other when their relationship starts going sour, this group of young people use their colorful language very ineffectively. The play also shows how much friends can influence a romantic relationship. Joan and Bernie become very jealous of their friends' relationship and their influence can be seen in the destruction of Deborah and Danny's romance. In Bruce Weber's article "Theatre Review; Mamet? Innocence? Perversity Has Changed" he describes this

situation by saying, “[Joan and Bernie’s] bilious influence eventually reclaims the friends they were in danger of losing to love, leaving everyone energetically miserable at the end (1).” Both of these are things that everyone can relate to when it comes to their relationships.

First, I would like to examine the dialogue between the romantic couple, Danny and Deborah. Almost immediately after they meet they sleep together, which leads to some very awkward conversation:

DANNY: Well.

DEBORAH: Well.

DANNY: Yeah, well, hey...uh... (*Pause.*) I feel great. (*Pause.*) You?

DEBORAH: Uh huh.

DANNY: Yup. (*Pause.*) You, uh, you have to go to work (you work, right?) (DEB
nods.) You have to go to work tomorrow?

DEBORAH: Yes. Well...

DANNY: You’re going home?

DEBORAH: Do you want me to?

DANNY: Only if you want to. Do you want to? (24)

This awkward dialogue with multiple pauses is a perfect example of a type of relationship poker. You have to guess what cards the other person has and decide if you want to show what you got. By the end of this conversation, Deborah and Danny end up both having royal flushes.

This is very similar to a scene I wrote between my two characters, Sam and Emily. They are both struggling to tell the other person that they like them without coming on too strong or being rejected. At the same time, they are also both trying to confess to the other person that they are homosexual. This is an excerpt from scene 41:

EMILY: It seems like there are no guys for me. I don't even feel attracted to guys all that much.

SAM: Like...at all? Like...you are into girls?

EMILY: I don't know. I've never been with a girl, but sometimes it's like I have deeper feelings for them.

SAM: Oh...

EMILY: You don't think I'm a freak do you? We've gotten to know each other a good bit...

SAM: No I actually understand exactly how you feel.

EMILY: Really?

SAM: Yeah, I'm like that. A lesbian, I mean.

EMILY: Oh, then, yeah, I guess you do understand.

SAM: Yeah. Can I be honest with you?

EMILY: Sure.

SAM: I have...those deeper feelings for you.

EMILY: Yeah? Me too.

SAM: Well, I'm glad we figured that out. (24)

This scene is very similar to the former scene in *Sexual Perversity* between Deborah and Danny with the exception that Sam and Emily have not been intimate yet. From both this play and my own experience trying to talk to someone I like, I managed to make my own scene a poker game with its own start-and-stop tempo. Just like Deborah and Danny, Sam and Emily's conversation leads to a successful tie.

Once Deborah and Danny begin their relationship they settle into a comfortable and flirty courtship:

DANNY: So tell me.

DEBORAH: What?

DANNY: Everything. Tell me the truth about everything. Menstruation. I know
you're holding out on me.

DEBORAH: It would be hard on me if it got out.

DANNY: I swear.

DEBORAH: It's under our conscious control.

DANNY: I knew it!

DEBORAH: We just do it to drive you crazy with the mess.

DANNY: I just knew it...

I create a similar scene between my two characters, Tanya and Jake. They were also intimate before they started dating and are on a bit of a honeymoon period. This is an excerpt from scene 44:

JAKE: I'm glad you came out tonight.

TANYA: Well, I checked the girlfriend guide and apparently when you're dating
you're supposed to go out on Valentine's Day. So I had to break my
usual tradition of drinking and watching slasher movies.

JAKE: Isn't this more fun.

TANYA: It's OK. But I had to tape myself into this dress. You may need to rip it
off me later.

JAKE: Another wonderful Valentine's Day tradition.

These are the fun little private moments that couples have when everything is exciting and new. Basically, right before everything goes to hell. It may read as corny, but this is really how couples like to talk to each other. I got to observe this several times with my friends T. H. and E. B. (initials used for privacy). The ridiculousness of their touchy, love-talk makes the people around them want to vomit a little every time they hear it. Then I realized that I am just as guilty of doing that in my own relationships. Therefore, as ridiculously cliché as the conversations between these characters seem, it is very natural for presently happy couples to talk this way to one another.

Finally, there is the role that our friends play in our relationships. Our friends can either be helpful when it comes to our romantic relationships or they can be destructive. Joan is destructive and pessimistic when it comes to Deborah's romantic life. Joan is extremely bitter when it comes to men. She reveals this when she philosophizes to Deborah, "Men...They're all after only one thing (18)." She becomes increasingly jealous the more Deborah's relationship with Danny develops. When Deborah breaks the news that she is moving in with Danny, instead of being supportive, Joan responds with, "I give you two months (48)." Danny's friend, Bernie, is not any better. In a monologue he repeats some advice that he gave to Danny when he said that he loved Deborah:

So I tell him, "Dan, Dan, I can *advise*, I can *counsel*, I can speak to you out of my own *experience*...but in the final analysis, you are on your own...If you want my *opinion*, however, you are pussy-whipped."...Sell his soul for a little eating pussy, and who can blame him. But mark my words: one, two more weeks, he'll do the right thing by the broad...And drop her like a fucking hot potato. (46)

Not only does this reveal how little respect that Bernie has for women, it also shows what he thinks about his friend being in a relationship. Instead of supporting Danny's love for Deborah, he would much rather dismiss it as a brief infatuation.

I decided to go a different way with my characters. Very close friendships develop between Gaby and Kylie, and Tanya and Sam. They support each other through all of their struggles especially when it comes to love. Sam encourages Tanya to believe that love can be real and lasting, even after she loses the man she cares about. Tanya has made it a rule not to get involved in serious relationships in order to avoid heartbreak and loss. Sam tells her, "If you don't let yourself love anyone it doesn't matter how many fuck buddies you have. At the end of the day you'll be alone. Just you and twelve cats (46)." With this, Sam is clearly advising Tanya that being in a relationship can be a fulfilling and wonderful thing when it is with someone you love. This is entirely opposite from Bernie who believes that men only think they love women when they are getting laid, but eventually they snap out of it.

On the other side, Joan has no sympathy for Deborah after the destruction of her relationship with Danny. While acting like she is trying to be supportive, it is easy to see that Joan is pleased that her friend's relationship went up in flames. Maybe she was envious that she did not have a man or maybe she felt like her best friend was being stolen from her. Either way, this excerpt from the play reveals even more of the twisted bitterness that exists in Joan:

JOAN: You learn from your mistakes, Deborah. Man is the one animal who has
that capacity.

DEBORAH: Yes.

JOAN: You can't live in the past.

DEBORAH: No.

JOAN: It does you no good.

DEBORAH: I know it.

JOAN: And, in the end, what do you have? You have your friends. (60).

Just this last line reveals Joan's selfish motives. She really does seem to be the definition of the phrase, "Misery loves company." Instead of sympathizing with her friend, she'd much rather enjoy saying, "I told you so."

Once again, I did the opposite with the friendships between my characters. When it comes to failed relationships, they support each other through the rough patch. They may use some tough love, but they do not enjoy the situation like Joan seems to. When Kylie falls into depression over Nik's infidelity, Gaby is there:

GABY: Oh, no you don't. You are going to get out of that bed, take a shower, and get dressed.

KYLIE: How the fuck did you get in?

GABY: I flashed your R.A. Now get up!

KYLIE: I'm tired.

GABY: That's what happens when you stay in bed for a week. Come on, don't let a man do this to you...Babe, you can't let some guy do this to you. You're giving him power over you. I know it hurts, but that will lessen over time.

KYLIE: Just leave.

GABY: No. I'm not going to let you go down the drain because of that jackass.

You've stayed in bed for an entire week, you've hardly gone to any classes. You won't pick up the damn phone, I was worried sick about you!

(39-41)

While Gaby is not exactly the softest person, she definitely cares about the wellbeing of her friend and is there to support her. Her only concern is about being there for someone who needs her despite the difficulties she herself is going through. Gaby is similar to many of my close friends who are understanding, strong, and tough as nails when I need them to be.

In an interview with Hank Nuwer, David Mamet reflects, “What is missing is the feeling of knowing our place and a sense of belonging.” This is very true about both the characters of *Sexual Perversity* and the characters in my film. Deborah, Joan, Danny, and Bernie suffer from their failed pursuit of happiness which is the only thing that all four of them have in common. Joan has nearly given up in her search. Bernie tries to find happiness by being selfish and pursuing surface pleasures like easy sex and a lot of booze. Deborah and Danny try to find happiness in each other, but they do not realize that they cannot be fulfilled with another person if they are not fulfilled themselves. My characters are trying to find happiness in their own lives. Tanya tries to find happiness in being on her own and later, she tries to learn how to make someone else happy. Gaby has life figured out, until a surprise pregnancy leads her to question how she is going to continue her life. Sam knows that she is a lesbian and accepts it. What she needs to know is will she be able to find someone who can accept her. Finally, there is young Kylie who is just trying to survive the battlefields of school, love, and life. While I definitely studied *Sexuality Perversity in Chicago* for the dialogue, I studied my own past and present relationships when it came to my characters. Each of my four female leads share characteristics and experiences that reflect either my life or the lives of my friends. They work together in order to find themselves and help each other in this journey of self-discovery.

There is one particular creative work that was a great source of inspiration for me before I even decided what to do for my thesis project. This work is the 2008 film *The Women* starring such amazing actresses as Meg Ryan, Annette Bening, Debra Messing, Jada Pinkett Smith, Eva Mendes, and Bette Midler. On imdb.com this film is classified as a comedy/drama and I completely agree with this classification. Some, mostly those who have not seen the film, qualify it as a romantic comedy or “chick flick.” What these people do not realize is the very deep meaning in this film about the lives of women, from career choices to family to friendships to what makes women...women.

This film surrounds the life of Mary Haines and, to a lesser extent her best friend, Sylvie Fowler. Mary Haines spends her energy trying to be everything to everyone. She tries to be superwoman; mother, wife, designer, daughter, friend. She ends up not having enough time for anyone, especially herself. She faces this reality when she discovers from a chatty manicurist that her neglected husband is having an affair with the sultry perfume girl, Crystal. From here on her entire life begins to fall apart around her.

Her best friend, Sylvie, is the head editor of a high-class women’s magazine. Her goal is to bring deeper, greater meaning to her magazine in order to more honestly reach out to women. She is constantly fighting those who want to keep the magazine shallow to boost sales. What she discovers is that her job, especially her fear of losing her job, begins to control her life. With the help of the ever-pregnant Edie and the nocturnal Alex, Mary and Sylvie rise out of the ruins of their former lives, and discover new dreams and their new selves.

This 2008 film is a remake of the 1939 film that was based on a play by former congresswoman Clare Boothe Luce. The original Broadway production opened in 1936 with an all female cast. This tradition is continued in both film versions. The amazing thing is the first

time I watched the 2008 version, I did not notice that you never saw a male actor. In fact, it was not until someone pointed that out to me and I watched it the second time, that I realized it for myself.

The most recent film version was adapted, produced, and directed by Diane English as her feature film debut. Although many people, including myself, do not have much faith in the quality of remakes, English proved nay-sayers wrong, at least in my opinion. In an interview with Melissa Silverstein, English states:

I... [Believe] that you don't remake a movie unless you have something new to say. And because women have come so far and changed so much in 70 years, attitudes towards us are very different and attitudes towards each other are so different, that I thought it was ripe for a remake. (1)

I have to agree. Society has radically changed since the thirties especially with the introduction of so many new technologies and the expectations that women still have to hold down the home life while maintaining careers.

Diane English is a prime example of a successful career woman. She began as a high school English teacher in Buffalo, New York before becoming a TV producer for the New York City PBS station WNET. She went on to write several TV-movies and series including her very successful sitcom *Murphy Brown*. Like her previous and future projects, English's main character was a strong, independent woman. Candice Bergen played Murphy Brown, a TV person in a high-profile media career much like English. According to absoluteastronomy.com English won one Emmy for Outstanding Writing in a Comedy and two for Outstanding Comedy series with *Murphy Brown*. She has also won many other awards including the Writers Guild

Award, the Genie Award, American Women in Radio and Television, and the Commissioners' Award, National Commission on Working Women.

I chose *The Women* to study in order to observe the depiction of women and their relationships with their friends, family, careers, and themselves. While this film was written about women in their thirties and forties, it is still prevalent to what I want expressed in my film. It is a story that centers on women and the shared experiences that they go through which is what my film is all about. How can women balance all of the different things in their lives? According to Betty Friedan in her book *The Feminine Mystique*, "The truth is...an American woman no longer has a private image to tell her who she is, or can be, or wants to be...They are sorely in need of a new image to help them find their identity (72)." This is the main lesson for Mary Haines who ends up stretching herself so thin that everything falls apart. By trying to be what everyone else wants her to be, she forgets what she wants, who she is, and ends up not being able to be there for anyone, including her young daughter. She goes on a retreat to get away from her problems. There she meets talent agent Leah Miller who gives her some valuable advice:

Don't give a shit about anybody. Be selfish. Because once you ask yourself the question "what about me?" everything changes for the better. I mean after all, who are you? What do you want, Mary? (*The Women*)

Mary tries this and, with a lot of hard work, is able to discover her dreams and how to keep it in balance with her friends and family. She becomes happier and truer to herself.

Her best friend, Sylvie, has a similar experience. Sylvie is a single, successful, high-society magazine editor that loves to shop and strongly believes that, "Men have a hard time being with a successful woman so we shrink to fit." This has become increasingly difficult to achieve since a Women and Work survey that found out of two-thousand women polled, "30%

earn more than their partners, and a further 19% earn the same amount (1).” Sylvie has reached the top of her career field where the circle of women leaders is very small. According to Alix Stuart’s article “The perils of flextime,” in 2010 only 10% of CFO’s in the Fortune 500 were women. That is an increase of only 2% since 2006. These factors not only make finding a relationship hard for Sylvie, but it also makes her career goals extremely difficult. Sylvie’s goal is to transfer a shallow women’s magazine into a piece of work that champions the realities of womanhood and the world. This proves to be nearly impossible in a world where the idea of what women are has long been shaped by men. In her book, *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir explains that in a patriarchal society:

women have never constituted a closed and independent society; they form an integral part of the group which is governed by males and in which they have a subordinate place...they belong at one and the same time to the male world and to a sphere in which that world is challenged; shut up in their world surrounded by the other, they can settle down nowhere in peace. 597

By changing the magazine, Sylvie is trying to revolutionize not only the way that men think of women, but the way women think of themselves. The problem is that even the women that she works with are not onboard with her vision. After the hundreds, perhaps thousands, of years that women have been taught about the way men see them, what chance do we have but to believe it ourselves? Can we break away from that norm? De Beauvoir expresses that the reason women have trouble doing so is because, “women are always trying to conserve...rather than to destroy and build anew; they prefer compromise and adjustment to revolution (602).” Sylvie is a revolutionary, but the women around her are conservers. They know that putting hot young women on magazine covers and filling the inside with beauty ads, diet tricks, and steamy gossip

sells. The pressure put on Sylvie by her female colleagues and her male boss begins to make her cave on her vision and resort back to the superficial format. At one point she becomes so desperate to keep her job that she betrays the confidence of her best friend to a tabloid writer. She then begins to reevaluate her stressful career and life alone. In the end she quits her job, decides to continue pursuing her vision, and even begins considering a romantic relationship. What Mary and Sylvie learn about themselves is revealed in a brief conversation they have towards the end of the film:

MARY: I think we can have it all. The question is do we want it?

SYLVIE: I don't want it all. I just want a really nice piece of it.

I found these statements really inspiring to my own life. Even though I have not taken on the responsibilities of my own family, I feel that I am constantly trying to balance family, school, job, projects, and relationships. It is very easy to get lost and to forget about what is best for me.

Though not a main character it was Mary's daughter, Molly, who really touched me. At her young age she is struggling with accepting who she is. This is extremely difficult in an age where societal expectations of women are so multifaceted and with the constant bombardment of super model images on TV and in magazines. Although she is much younger than my characters it is still something that young women struggle with even after teen-hood. This struggle is reflected by cosmetic surgery statistics. According to the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ASAPS), "there were over 10 million cosmetic procedures performed in the United States in 2008...Surgical procedures accounted for 17% of the total...Women had over 9.3 million cosmetic procedures, almost 92% percent of the total (www.cosmeticplasticsurgerystatistics.com).” Her crisis continues when her mother begins going through her separation and Molly loses the woman who is supposed to be her role model. She

begins counting carbs, cutting school, and smoking cigarettes with the false belief that supermodels are true representatives of grown women. According to the article “Adolescent Girls and Body Image,” fashion models weigh 23% less than the average female making them far cries from every day women. However, this is the body image that is seen on almost every magazine, TV show, commercial, and movie. Being slender and beautiful is praised throughout the media and constantly linked to being able to achieve success, love, and happiness. These images overwhelm both young girls and women sometimes to the point that we loath our own gender. There is one particular scene in *The Women* where Molly is sitting on the porch burning tampons because she has decided that she no longer wants to be a woman (*The Women*) and with everything women are confronted with who can blame her? With her struggle with her impending womanhood, Molly represents the scared, uncertain girl that stays with us for the rest of our lives. Her eventual acceptance of being female happens when she sees her mother finally doing what makes her happy. I believe that when we see women that we can look up to enjoying their lives and work, it gives us hope that we will find happiness in our own lives.

Finally, I looked at the relationships between the four female friends in this film. Mary, Sylvie, Edie, and Alex are four very different women who joke, argue, and always support each other. This was the bond I wanted to include with my four female characters. There is a saying that says, “Men come and go, but best friends are forever.” That phrase could probably be amended to say “Men and women come and go...” but the premise is the same. It is a common theme, but universal for women. It is important for us to maintain relationships with other women for advise, fun, love, support, and encouragement. None of us are islands. We are stronger when we have people that we can turn to even if it is just to talk. When Mary and Sylvie’s friendship breaks apart, it makes it harder for them to deal with life without each other.

Sylvie ends up quitting her job since she had to betray Mary's confidence to a tabloid writer in order to keep it. When they reconcile Mary says that not having Sylvie in her life was like having Phantom Limb syndrome. Even though Sylvie was not there Mary could still feel her around. This bond is something that I feel with my closest friends and something I wanted to show. My film shows four girls meeting, getting to know each other, and being there for each other through all of their struggles.

In my film I wanted to show strong, intelligent young women, their experiences, and their relationships with each other. This is why I studied *The Women*. It depicts women who are trying to discover how to balance out their lives, figure out what they want, and be there for each other. Although these women are older than the characters that I created, what they go through is important at any age. Mary Haines represents a woman who has tried to be the best at everything and it ends up ruining her happiness. Sylvie represents a woman who made her work her life and loves it, but eventually she starts making compromises that destroy her dream. Mary and Sylvie both have to find a balance between doing what they love and being there for the ones they love. Finally, the character of Molly with all of her self-doubt and need for a role model is also something universal to women. The relationships and the self-discovery in *The Women* is what inspired my writing and the creation of my characters: Kylie, Sam, Gaby, and Tanya.

Another film that I watched in order to study the writing and the characters was *Grand Canyon*. This 1991 film was co-written by husband/wife team Lawrence and Meg Kasdan, and directed by Lawrence Kasdan. According to Peter Travers in his article for *Rolling Stone Movies*, "The script...encompasses crime, racism, homelessness, an earthquake, Felliniesque dreams and problems ranging from making a left turn in L.A. to finding the meaning of life (1)." This movie contains many questions about life and the way we live it and it takes place in one of the largest,

most diverse cities in the United States. With everything going on in this film, it takes honest writing and real characters to hold it together. This was what I needed in my own script.

Imdb.com labels *Grand Canyon* as a drama, but I want to call it reality. The story is about several characters that, through a series of different events, begin to question how they live their lives and then begin to develop as individuals. Mack is an immigration lawyer who lives in a privileged L.A. neighborhood and drives a nice car. One night he takes a wrong turn in that car and ends up broken down in an urban neighborhood waiting for a tow truck, when some black gang members arrive with guns. An unlikely rescuer, the tow truck driver Simon, arrives on the scene and his calm honesty convinces the gang to leave. The event causes Mack to want to strike up a friendship with the man who saved his life, especially because of a past situation when he let his rescuer disappear without ever finding out who she was. While Mack is musing over why he was meant to meet Simon, Claire, Mack's wife, is doing her best to deal with her son growing up and the impending empty nest. Her nest is not empty for long. One day she comes across an abandoned baby in the bushes while out jogging. She decides that she was meant to find this child and take care of it; much like Mack was meant to meet Simon.

Simon starts out a bit trepidatious about his new relationship with Mack, but he eventually becomes very grateful for the friendship. Simon struggles with trying to take care of his sister, a single mother whose son is getting involved in gangs and his own sense of loneliness with his daughter off at college. When the neighborhood begins to be too dangerous for his sister's family, Mack offers to help Simon find an apartment in a safer part of town. Mack also introduces him to Jane, an assistant in his building. Simon and Jane are puzzled at the setup and conclude that they, "are the only two black people [Mack] knows." Fortunately, they end up really enjoying each other's company and they fall in love. While Mack is setting up Jane, he is

ignoring his own assistant, Dee, who becomes increasingly depressed over her love for her married boss. Their office relationship had previously been a brief affair that left the single Dee feeling lvelorn. After realizing that her feelings will never be reciprocated, she makes the decision to find a new job to create a better situation for herself. By doing this, she finally stands up for herself and gives herself a chance to move on.

On the other side of the spectrum is Mack's Hollywood producer friend, Davis. Davis is a bit of a contradiction as a man who loves to talk philosophy, but produces movies full of mindless violence and action. It is not until he is shot by a mugger who wants his Rolex that he realizes the tragic impact of random violence. He then makes a vow to begin making his work more meaningful. His enlightenment ends up not sticking, but he does finally make a commitment to the woman he loves.

Finally, there is Roberto, Mack and Claire's son. He is quickly growing up, getting into relationships, and learning how to drive. Roberto represents innocence in a very guilty society. His driving lesson represents not only his coming of age, but also many of the quick decisions that people have to make every day. His biggest driving challenge is making a left turn in L.A. His ability to do so represents that he is growing up. The split-second decision about when to make the turn represents many of the decisions that we have to make quickly in order to stay on track and not be crushed by the weight of the world, or oncoming traffic.

Director and co-writer Lawrence Kasdan has many film credits including *Body Heat*, *Silverado*, *The Big Chill*, *Grand Canyon*, and *Darling Companion*. His wife, Meg Kasdan has collaborated on several of his projects including co-writing and producing *Grand Canyon* and *Darling Companion*. In Judy Gerstel's article for the *Detroit Free Press*, Lawrence Kasdan says that, "'Grand Canyon' ... is 'about what's going on, about the frustration mark. It came to be

spiritual. And full of outrage. People know this is not the way it's supposed to be (1).” Reading this thought provoking comment really made me wonder what Kasdan meant. *Grand Canyon* was nominated for an Oscar, Golden Globe, and WGA Award, and it won the Golden Berlin Bear and PFS Award. What about this movie made it so highly esteemed? I can understand being frustrated, being full of outrage, and searching for some greater spiritual meaning that explains why life is the way it is. I hate listening to the news, because every time I hear about people killing each other because they say “god” in different languages or that a junkie killed someone on the street to get the money for a fix, I cannot help thinking that the world should not be the way it is.

Have we, as a society or even a race, become so immune to the noise going on around us that we do not even try to make decisions that are good for more people than just ourselves? Is there a chance that beneath all of our apathy, we still have the impulse to reach out to each other and do the right thing? Quoted in Gerstel's article, Kasdan says, “every day is a moral choice about how you're going to live (2).” It is the honesty in this statement that makes this film powerful. We are constantly faced with moral choices, and this makes the situations in this film easy to identify with. I wanted to achieve this same degree of honesty with my film. I want all women and also men to be able to identify with my characters and what they go through. In order to do this the dialogue is really important. One scene I looked at in *Grand Canyon* is between Dee and Jane. This is an excerpt of their conversation when they are eating together:

DEE: Come on, don't give me a hard time.

JANE: Dee, no one knows less about men than me.

DEE: You do all right.

JANE: OK, let me ask you one question first. Do you like your job?

DEE: I know what you're gonna say.

JANE: You can kiss it goodbye. It never fails. I absolutely guarantee you the thing ends with you losing your job. And not because you're the missis now, livin' in the big house.

DEE: I don't think that. I wouldn't even want that. Give me a little credit, will you? One thing I think is so great about him is how devoted he is to his wife and kid.

JANE: You are so full of shit, you know that? You may not even know, but you really are. You're sayin' what they all say at first. I've seen it many times, honey. If he is so devoted to his wife, what's he doin' messin' around with you?

DEE: He hasn't done anything.

JANE: You told me you were holding hands today.

DEE: Big deal. I shouldn't even have told you.

JANE: You gotta tell somebody that shit. That's how you know it's happening.

Listening to the way they talk to each other about their lives helped me write the conversations between my female characters. Here is an excerpt of a conversation between two of my characters, Gaby and Kylie:

GABY: I can't believe you hooked up with that guy at the party.

KYLIE: We didn't "hook up." I just gave him my number and he asked me out.

GABY: So what number date is this?

KYLIE: Three. Four if you count the coffee we had together early this week.

GABY: Four dates. You know what that means.

KYLIE: Will you stop?

GABY: Come on, haven't you thought about it?

KYLIE: Maybe?

GABY: Uh-huh. What kind of underwear are you wearing?

KYLIE: Lace with a matching bra.

GABY: Just remember, never party without your party hat.

KYLIE: Yes, mother. (25-26)

While the content is different the ease of the conversation is the same. One of the women, Dee in *Grand Canyon* or Kylie in *C.I.A.*, is the focus of the conversation while the other, Jane and Gaby, is giving advice and opinion. The conversation between the women is easy, which is the result of a close friendship. They tell each other the truth about what they think and feel.

There is also the kind of relationship where one person teaches the other. This is normally a student/teacher relationship, a parent/child relationship, or a friendship. In *Grand Canyon* this teaching relationship exists between Mack and his son Roberto. At one point in the movie, Mack takes Roberto out to teach him to drive, which in L.A. is no easy task especially when it comes to making a left turn. Mack tells Roberto:

MACK: The thing is, it's so crazy out there, you gotta react really fast. If you're
going, you've got a split second, otherwise the cross traffic'll whack you.

ROBERTO: I'm sorry, Dad.

MACK: Hey, this is difficult stuff. Making a left turn in LA is one of the
harder things you're gonna learn in life .

This kind of parent/child teaching relationship is very common and real. In many ways driving is a rite of passage that marks the beginnings of adulthood. It is only natural that this is taught by

the parent. In my film there is a similar teaching relationship, but it is a student/student relationship. This relationship exists between the freshman, Kylie, and the junior, Gaby. The two experience several run-ins and it seems almost like fate that they find each other. Kylie is struggling not to let college overwhelm her, but feels like she is sinking fast. Gaby understands what she is going through, because of her own freshman experience. This inspires her to reach out to Kylie, shown in this excerpt from my script:

GABY: Because I was a freshman who made a lot of mistakes. I couldn't decide on a major. Suddenly school was hard, unlike in high school. Life became overwhelming. And I was so paranoid about failing. On my way to take the test, I made a wrong turn, and ended up on the interstate heading towards my family's lake house.

KYLIE: You just left?

GABY: Yeah, I snapped a little.

KYLIE: Oh, shit!

GABY: Look, I bounced back, but not everyone does. You know how at orientation they give you that great little pep talk about how one of the two people sitting beside you will not graduate?

KYLIE nods.

GABY: Statistically, that's true. That's why the parking is so much better during the second half of the semester.

KYLIE: Oh my god, I'm one they talked about.

GABY: No you're not. You are kinda naive and that's annoying, but you're a freshman so I can't hold that against you. And you're really cute.

KYLIE: Are you hitting on me?

GABY: Save experimentation for your sophomore year. What I mean is, I look at you and I remember what it was like. And it sucked. It sucked ass. So I'm going to go against my nature and help you. And maybe things will suck a little less. (13-14)

Many consider going to college as a rite of passage. You leave home, learn to take care of yourself, and become responsible for getting your own work done without anyone looking over your shoulder. This sudden transition can be overwhelming for a lot of people. Gaby had to figure out how to make it through on her own after nearly failing. When she sees Kylie beginning to fall into a similar pattern, she decides to guide her so that hopefully, she will have an easier time. In this way Gaby becomes not just a friend, but a teacher.

According to Roger Ebert in his review of *Grand Canyon*, “The dialogue...throughout the movie, does not simply exist to push along the plot. It is the way we really think and talk in various situations (1).” I believe that this is what good dialogue does for plays and films, and Lawrence and Meg Kasdan achieved this wonderfully with *Grand Canyon*. From being threatened by gang members, talking to a loved one, and confronting a boss, the writing in this movie is filled with honesty in both action and word. I tried very hard to write about what I know, which is college, and all of my actors are either in college or recently graduated so they identify easily with their characters. Like the characters that they play, they have parents, teachers, friends, and lovers. I created my characters to be dynamic people who learn more about life and who they are through the course of one academic year and with the foreshadowing that they are just beginning their journey. *Grand Canyon* helped me stop trying to make my dialogue witty and clever, and just make real characters with real relationships.

A very important decision I had to make was what style I wanted to make my film in. I already knew I wanted to make it a drama. While I was writing, one of my main obstacles was figuring out how to reveal the inner thoughts of the characters to the audience. In novels the narrator, which can be a character, just tells the audience what thoughts are running through a character's mind. Increasingly, this is being used in film and television especially with the rise of reality shows and documentaries. Then, one day in early September, I was trying to think of something to write and flipped on the TV for some inspiration and fell upon an episode of *The Office*. That was when I decided to give my script a similar writing style.

The Office first became a television series in England in 2001. Ricky Gervais wrote, directed, and starred in this hilarious mockumentary. Then in 2005 he helped created the American version starring Steve Carell which is currently on its seventh season and one of my favorite shows. According to Dictionary.com's 21st Century Lexicon, a mockumentary is, "a film or television program that is shot like a documentary but is fictitious and [usually satirical]." While my film is not a documentary, it is shot with similar resources to one with hardly any budget, a two to three person crew, and one camera. Also, my four main characters are able to express their inner thoughts about the current action straight to the audience via the camera. By doing so they break the fourth wall, but it gives the film more of a documentary feel which makes the events seem more real. This is what I want this film to have since it is based on the real life experiences of women in college. For example, while Tanya is filling out her graduation work she talks about her trepidation about leaving college. It begins as a voiceover while she is filling out her papers and then becomes a monologue to the camera:

TANYA is sitting at a computer going through online catalog and her transcripts.

She has a lot of graduation paperwork in front of her. She is writing on it.

TANYA (V.O.): This is my fourth year and after this I lose most of my scholarships
so I really need to graduate.

TANYA is sitting in the study room holding her graduation forms.

TANYA: I swore I wouldn't be like some of my older friends and put this off. But
now that it is getting so close...I mean what would be so bad about
another year. I could add a minor in something I really like. Or I could
take a bunch of random fun classes like karate or bowling or... Anyway,
I can't wait to get out of here. But I just don't see what the big hurry is,
you know.

This is very similar to the way that *The Office* gives its characters small monologues straight to the camera that can overlap with the current action. This allows the characters to clearly express their thoughts and feelings about what is going on.

By helping me discover a way to make the action seem like present events and giving my characters an outlet for their inner thoughts, *The Office* got me over my brief writer's block. Who would have thought that Michael Scott and Dwight Schrute could be so inspirational?

Finally, once I get past all of the research, there is what I experienced during the academic year that I spent working on this project. The following is the thesis journal that I have been keeping since July when I first started concretely writing down ideas for my thesis. These dates are the ones that I found to be some of my most relevant experiences:

Thesis Journal

Entry 1

7 July 2010

Well, I've done it. I started writing the script for my thesis. I did not get a lot done and I only worked for about an hour, but it is something. I am not quite sure what it is going to become. I seem to want to include everything from theatre, to film, to dance. I'll probably just write something for the stage or the camera. I want to do something big that could become something amazing. I wish I could just devote all my energy to this. But I also have classes that I need to take and a part time job. I'm already nervous that either my school work will suffer or my thesis will. And while it will be difficult to do, I think that my school work can afford to suffer a little bit. I really want to put everything I have into this project. As long as I pass my classes and graduate I will be okay with my grades not being perfect, if it means my thesis project will be. At least it will be as close to perfect as possible.

Anyway, while I was working I watched a special about tiger cubs in Australia on Animal Planet. It was about an island where they raised this group of four tiger cubs. One was a beautiful white male. It was a good hour.

Entry 2

3 August 2010

I now have my thesis advisor. Bobby Funk has agreed to help me with this final step of my undergraduate career. I met with him today after rehearsal for *Robin Goodfellow*. We talked about what my project was even going to be. I told him all of my scatterbrained multimedia ideas and how the only thing I knew was that it was going to be about four female college students.

After talking for a little bit, Bobby suggested I do a film that I would write and direct. I thought it was a great idea. As much as I love acting and stage, I do love film and it is where I want my career to end up. Besides, directing is as much fun to me as acting, for different reasons.

Anyway, I am so excited about this project although I despise the idea of editing it. Hopefully, I will be able to get a really good crew together so that I can focus on the producing and directing. I have no idea what I am going to write, but the only way to know is to get started. I think the small amount that I have already done is usable. I cannot wait to see where it goes.

Entry 3

14 September 2010

Well, I have turned in the first few pages of the script so far. I had a meeting with Bobby this morning to turn them in. I mentioned that I was having a few problems writing the dialogue. I am beginning to really see the characters, getting to know their personalities and attitudes, but writing casual conversation is proving rather difficult. I have had trouble with this before when I've written short scripts for other student projects. Bobby suggested that I have some friends over, buy them a couple of drinks, and record their conversation. I think this is a brilliant idea. My friends do like to talk. Granted, I will probably clean up the speech in the script, but this could prove to be a very fruitful experience and give me some recorded research.

I have also been talking to Bobby about other things to look at to give me ideas. He told me to look at the movie, *The Grand Canyon*, and read the play, *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*, by David Mamet. I will also be studying some movies and shows whose styles I want to imitate. I have chosen *The Women* and *The Office*. The first because of the strong female influences and the second because of the filming style. I have decided to have the four main female characters

have some one-on-one scenes with the camera to reveal their inner thoughts about what is going on in their lives. Also, the filming style of *The Office* is very realistic and casual which I think is the best bet for a small budget student film. And by small budget I mean whatever I can spare from my minimum wage part-time job after paying bills. So basically nothing. This is going to be the most rockin' research ever conducted!

Entry 4

20 September 2010

Last night was my first attempt at having friends over to record their conversations. It did not go quite how I hoped. I had sent the invites out for the whole thing to start at 7 p.m. By 8:30 p.m., no had showed up except for my boyfriend, C.J., and my best friend, Sonya. I was fairly disappointed, but talking with Sonya was helpful for getting an idea of how girls talk to each other. She and I have always been able to sit down and just talk about anything and everything for hours. I noticed how we would start one conversation, then some random detail would lead to a whole other conversation, and finally we would get back to the original topic. This way we could keep up several conversations just going back and forth. I guess this is why women are so good at multitasking.

At around 11p.m. Sonya went home to work on some school work and I was ready to go to bed. Unfortunately, I didn't think about some of my less time conscious friends. A group of about four people showed up expecting drinks. Since I needed some more recorded conversation I decided to let them in. They stayed until about 2a.m. when I finally kicked them out. Next time I am going to put an end time on the invite. I feel like such a failure as a college student, but I need my sleep.

I loaded the recording on to my computer so that I can review it later. I plan to have at least one more get together to record. Hopefully more people will show up.

Entry 5

4 October 2010

Last night was my second attempt at recording a conversation with my friends. I scheduled it two weeks in advance, I sent out an invite on facebook that I constantly updated, and I was always reminding people. Only one of my friends showed up with three other people and my boyfriend. I was incredibly disappointed, but continued with the interview anyway. It was not too bad. The conversation went decently and I actually got to bed at a decent hour.

Then today happened and I ran into a huge road block that I just couldn't get past. I hadn't been able to check out the recorder that I was familiar with so I was given a small camcorder. I was shown how to turn it on, start it, and how to attach a more powerful microphone for better sound quality. Today I went to the lab so that I could get it on a computer and return the camcorder. Here I ran into a problem. While recording was easy, I could not figure out how to transfer it to the computer. I final figured out where the memory card was and put it into the computer, but the computer wouldn't recognize it. Then I got a USB cable and plugged up the camera. While the computer recognized the camera it would not recognize the format of the recording. I tried to convert it, but couldn't. I had two other students and a professor helping me at one point, but no one could figure this thing out and I needed to return the camcorder that day. After two hours of wanting to rip my hair out, I made a decision. I deleted the recording from the camera. Amazingly, I felt like a huge weight was lifted off my shoulders, because now there was nothing to do about it, but move on. I think this experience taught me two things. First,

I learned to never attempt to use equipment that I am not familiar with. The second thing that I learned is that it is okay to let things go when they aren't working. And once that happens, it is important not to dwell on it and be angry, but to pick up and continue with whatever needs to be done. This is a life lesson that I have struggled with since I was very young. I always want things to go exactly how I plan them and tend to get really upset when things don't work out. I need to learn how to let things go. That way I can be more productive instead of dwelling on disappointment.

Entry 6

9 October 2010

Tonight I watched one of my favorite movies and one of my inspirations for my script: *The Women* directed and screenplay by Diane English. This film stars actresses that I love: Meg Ryan, Debra Messing, Annette Bening, Jada Pinkett Smith, and Eva Mendes. I looked it up on Wikipedia (don't worry I will not use this as a thesis source) and this movie is a remake of a 1939 movie and that is an adaptation of a 1936 play by Clare Boothe Luce. The really interesting part about this film is that there isn't a single male actor, with the possible exception of the baby that is born at the end. This is also what made the play really controversial when it was first produced.

What I love about this movie is the way it portrays relationships and also the struggles that women go through. There are three main kinds of relationships in this movie: marital, friendships, and mother/daughter. The marital relationship is between Mary (Meg Ryan) and her husband Steven. All signs indicate that this marriage has been stale for some time, but Mary does not face that reality until she finds out that her husband is having an affair with the sexy perfume

girl, Crystal (Eva Mendes). Mary is given tons advice from everyone around her, but finally decides that she needed to figure out her own life and identity before fixing her marriage. In the end she rediscovers herself and her love for her husband and they decide to work on their relationship one step at a time.

Then there are the friendships between Mary, Sylvie (Annette Bening), Alex (Jada Pinkett Smith), and Eddie (Debra Messing). They are very different in their personalities and career, but they are there for each other through thick and thin. It is this kind of connection between women that I wanted for my female characters.

Finally, there are the mother/daughter relationships between Mary and her mother, Catherine (Candice Bergen), and Mary and her daughter, Molly (India Ennenga). While Mary has been independent from her mother for many years, her husbands' affair creates a bond between them since Catherine had been through a similar situation in her marriage. However, while Catherine decided to ignore it and let her husband end it on his own, Mary decides that she needs Steven out of the house until she can figure things out. This results in a journey of self-discovery that Catherine never took. She greatly supports her daughter and even invests in her new career, but feels envious that she didn't take the time to follow her own dreams.

Then there is Molly, a preteen who is struggling with becoming a young woman. She is lead to have a negative body image because of the ideal body images that she sees in music videos, in film, in advertisements, and in magazines. Sadly, her mother has stretched herself so thin and then becomes so occupied with her failing marriage that she can't be there for her daughter. It is when Mary does what makes her happy that Molly has a real role model.

Finally, this film inspires me, because of how it represents the many things that women struggle with. For example, Mary tries to be everything to everyone: wife, mother, daughter,

career woman, charity board member. It is exhausting and when you try to do everything nothing ever really gets done. Sylvie struggles with trying to revolutionize the way women think about themselves by revamping her magazine to make it more meaningful and about real women as opposed to models and celebrities. She finds that no one wants to make the plunge. Her life becomes so focused on her career that she even betrays her best friend to a tabloid writer to keep her job problems out of the press. Then there is Molly who suffers from low self-esteem and bad body image like nearly all women do. This comes around full circle to Mary's mother who ends up getting a face-lift because in her words, "I was the only sixty-year-old left." These are all things that women of any age can relate to and this is what I want for my movie. I want women to be able to relate to and be moved by it. I realize this is probably ambitious for a student project, but I think it is possible.

And I just want to say that I love watching movies for research!

Entry 7

19 October 2010

Tonight I watched a movie that Bobby Funk recommended to me: *Grand Canyon*. He told me that Steve Martin was in it so I thought it would be funny. Boy was I wrong. Turns out it is more of a drama with Danny Glover, Kevin Kline, Steve Martin, and other wonderful actors and actresses. Although it wasn't funny I still really enjoyed it.

In this movie the characters are connected in a sort of strange web and somehow it all seems like fate. Mack (Kevin Kline) is a successful immigration lawyer that takes a wrong turn into a bad neighborhood where his car breaks down. He calls for a tow truck and waits. A gang finds him and begins to threaten him till, luckily, Simon (Danny Glover) shows up with a tow

truck. With his calm honesty, Simon convinces the gang to leave and probably saves Mack's life. This starts an interesting friendship between the two. Mack feels that Simon saved him for a reason and he does not want to let him just disappear.

At the same time Mack's wife, Claire (Mary McDonnell), is becoming greatly saddened with the advancing age of her son. One day she is out jogging and she finds an abandoned baby in some bushes. She decides that she found this baby for a reason and that it is her fate to be the child's mother.

Then there is Mack's friend, Davis (Steve Martin), a Hollywood producer who makes movies filled with mindless violence. This is turned around on him when he becomes a victim of a gunshot wound from a man who wants his watch. He decides that he has "seen the light" and will devote his life to making movies that will change the world for the better. He also finally decides to commit to the woman he loves. He eventually goes back to making violent movies, so he doesn't change completely, but perhaps he learned something about how to improve the way he lives his life.

The whole movie seems to ask really big questions like: What is fate? How in control are we? What is moral? How do we escape our circumstances? How do we connect to one another? How do we decide what we need over what we want? The great writing of this film sets all of these questions before the audience. I think this is what great writing is supposed to be; thought provoking as well as entertaining. This film really made me think about how to write dialogue and situations that are both honest and thought provoking.

Entry 8

7 November 2010

Today I continued my research by reading the play *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* by David Mamet. Bobby recommended it to me and the title made me giggle, so I decided to read it.

So I immersed myself into the language of Mamet and it is a dirty world. It seems like every other word is fuck or shit or some other form of French. And at the very beginning the misogynist Bernie, regales his less offensive friend Danny, about his latest crazy sex-ploit. Frankly, after reading that one section, I had to take a pause to think about if such an adventure was even possible...without dying.

Once I got past that, I had to get used to the dialogue. Many of the sentences were incomplete and made little to no sense when being read. So what I did was ask CJ to read the play out loud with me. Suddenly, all of the dialogue made sense for the characters in all of the situations. It made me realize that this is really how people speak, but we don't think about it when we talk because we never see it actually written down. While the language is a bit, shocking, I went back and listened to the recordings of my friends and the language is very similar.

Mamet seems to use his language to show us that we cannot effectively communicate despite the many words at our disposal. This is well demonstrated in the brief relationship between the characters of Deborah and Danny. They date very briefly and then move into together. Pretty soon things go wrong and they are unable to talk to each other about how they feel. Instead they curse, fight, and have a horrible break-up. Their friends don't make it easier for them by constantly telling them that the relationship is doomed from the beginning.

The similarity between Mamet's characters and mine are that they are 20 something-year-olds who are trying to figure out their lives, which leads to a lot of mistakes. Danny and Deborah try to find themselves in each other. Bernie tries to find himself in sex with random women. Joan just wants to be miserable.

It is a funny play with great writing. I really hope to be able to see it on stage one day.

Entry 9

31 December 2010

I've spent my winter break working my butt off finishing my script with all the final edits and today I've finally done it. Or maybe it's yesterday. I'm spending my break in Iran which is eight and a half hours ahead of Johnson City, TN so I may actually be finishing this on the 30th Eastern Time. Anyway, the point is it is done. I've done nothing but read it over and over since I got here and I just sent it to my thesis chair in an email. Now I'm just going to set the date for my auditions, promote it, and relax until school starts again. For the rest of my time in Iran I'm going to enjoy spending time with my family and not being in school.

Entry 10

20 January 2011

Yesterday and the day before I held auditions for my film at the Campus Center. I borrowed the theatre department camera so that I could make sure that the actors would not freeze up when a camera was on them. While a few of them do need to work on the transition from theatre to film, I was very pleased that none of them were disturbed by the presence of a camera.

I did run into a few problems though. For one thing more men showed up than women, which never happens at an audition. So once I made all of my decisions I had still not cast the roles of Sam's Mother or Emily. Then, right before I sent out my cast list I received a facebook message from one of my actresses. She expressed that even though she had said on camera at the audition that she was comfortable with the role of Sam (the lesbian) she was thinking about it and she'd really rather not be cast in that role. She was also unsure she could act in it at all since I had two nighttime shoots on the schedule and she was involved in so much that she couldn't stay up that late. I called her and talked to her for a few minutes and just her uncertainty about the schedule made me decide not to cast her. So now I am three actresses short. However, I think it will be ok. I talked to a few other girls who I know will be perfect for those roles and they seemed really interested in participating.

I just wish that more people had shown up, but there is so much going on this semester. There is *Midsummer*, the Dance Concert, the New Works festival, *Wizard of OZ*, SETC, and so many community projects. However, I have put together a good cast and I'm sure they will be great.

Entry 11

3 February 2011

Today was the first day of filming and I loved it! I had a great crew and two of my actresses who have a lot of scenes together. Everything went pretty smoothly and we ended about an hour before my scheduled end time. It was a little difficult telling people what to do since only two days ago I had completely lost my voice, but I just drank a lot of tea with honey and powered through it. By the end of the night I was tired and without a voice, but I had so

much fun. I love this kind of work. I really believe that film is where my future is. I love acting, but I also love directing. I wish I could drop some of my classes; or rather all of them except my broadcasting and theatre course, and just focus on this project. I will be filming again Sunday. Unfortunately, I'm going to have to take a huge break for the first two weeks in March, because of SETC and Spring Break so after that's done we will be filming three to four day a week. Time to dive in.

Entry 12

18 February 2011

This was a difficult day. I spent the afternoon in the editing lab logging film and editing a promotion spot and had a huge host of problems. I had already done a lot of work and I went in to do some more. But for some reason my Edit Share did not save my settings and switched everything to HD settings and I couldn't get it back over. On top of that it didn't save half the work that I did. Thank god for Daniel Santiago, our brilliant engineer in the department. I'm sure he is thrilled that he won't hear my voice after this semester.

So Daniel came to my rescue. While he couldn't get back my lost work, he was able to transfer all of my logged footage into another hard drive and put it in the correct NTSC settings. I took notes on everything that he did so that I will be able to double check everything and this will never happen again. All in all, I lost about four hours of work. Amazingly, I did not completely lose it. I'll just go in tomorrow and do it again. I know what I need so I can cut that amount of time at least in half.

A few weeks ago I got a book called *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff—And it's all Small Stuff* by Richard Carlson. My mother had bought me a version for teens when I was younger, but I

never even opened it. I didn't want to admit to reading something like that. Now I keep this one on my bedside table and read one piece of advice every night before I go to bed. I've found myself trying, almost subconsciously to use the techniques in them and I think that I am becoming calmer and even a bit happier. It's interesting what just reading can do. I think that having this book is helping me let things go when they get messed up. So I made it through this hard experience without feeling like I'll never be able to take another step forward.

Entry 13

13 March 2011

I am exhausted and I have not even started back to class yet. I thought Spring Break was supposed to be restful. Well, some of it was. I spent three days in pigeon forge in a cabin with my boyfriend. It was nice for us to spend time together and just be able to relax for a few days.

However, it is Sunday, the day of rest and already I feel stressed and overworked. I've spent the weekend trying to figure out how I am going to film, edit, and keep up with my classes. So, I have cut out my two mornings and one evening a week to the gym for schoolwork, cut down to one day a week to work at the store, occasionally cut my audit classes, keep three to four days a week for filming, and all other spare time will be spent in the editing lab or working on the written part of my thesis. Hopefully, this will give me the time I need to get everything done.

Today I have been planning the next several days of filming. Organizing both cast and crew is exhausting in itself. One of my actresses couldn't make one day and another couldn't make two. I had to cancel one filming day and rearrange the other three. If I can pull it all off, I will only have to reschedule one scene. I also cut one superfluous scene that wasn't really

needed. It will only shave off a minute from the film, but with filming and editing it will be an hour less of work. I wish we were all less busy so I wouldn't have to change my schedule. But I am a student, most of my actors are students, and we all have part or fulltime jobs. Sadly I cannot pay them for their work or expect to be a priority above school and work. However, they have all been incredibly flexible and I am grateful. I wish I at least had my own equipment so I could film at a moment's notice instead of having to reserve several days in advance.

Well it is 11p.m. and time for me to get ready to sleep. It is going to be a 6:15 morning.

Entry 14

14 March 2011

Today was a busy day. I feel like my brain is about to explode. It is nearly midnight and I still haven't gotten enough done. I was listening to the radio this afternoon on my way back to campus from work and Katy Perry's "Firework" came on. I actually started tearing up. There have been a lot of times that I feel like there is no way I can pull off this project with school and work, let alone be good at any of it. The song actually was very uplifting. I felt really overwhelmed, but inspired at the same time. It reminded me that what I was doing was possible. I never thought I would say that about a Katy Perry song.

I edited the second promo today. I should have promo 1 uploaded to YouTube this week. Editing went off without a hitch and I was able to log the rest of my footage. I think those four years of training on final cut pro are paying off.

Entry 15

17 March 2011

Welcome to my St. Patrick's Day. Sitting on the couch, eating left-over fake Chinese food, going between a broadcasting power point presentation, a thesis, editing readings for an English institute, watching *30 Rock*, and drinking half a bottle of white sangria. Awesome.

I've spent the past few days working on reorganizing my film schedule and further editing my script. I'm cutting out any scene that can be explained by adding a line or two in another. It has been difficult since there is a lot going on. So far I have cut out three scenes and severely shortened one.

I think that I've bitten off more than I can chew. I think my script is good, especially at my level of experience. I think that what I have filmed thus far is really good, but the length of this project may have been too much to take on with a full time school schedule, a part-time job, and many of my actors having the same crazy schedules that I do.

But I wanted to do something big, amazing, and inspiring for my project. I wrote about my experiences and the experiences of my friends. I want this film to touch people and it is already touching my actors who can relate easily to their characters. Even if the film turns out to be horrible over all, at least I can say that I did it as an undergraduate at the age of 22.

Entry 16

20 March 2011

Today was the first time I tried to shoot in a public location. I took my crew with the two actors playing Tanya and Jake to Main Street Pizza. The owner, Jamie Dove, very graciously allowed us to do some of our filming there. We went during the afternoon when it was a bit slow

and I got some extras to come and fill some background seats. However, there were still a few occasions when I had to get people who wandered into the background of the scene to sign a release form. All in all things went very well. Everyone was very cooperative including the waiting staff. All in all it was a good experience, but I'm really glad that I decided to schedule only one scene there a day so that there is no huge time crunch. We did have to start over quite a few times because of people walking in and staring straight at the camera. There were also times when there were huge amounts of background noise and I had to politely ask a rather large group of guys to keep their volume a little low. Fortunately, I can be really sweet when I need to be and I was dressed cute. We will be coming back two more times to film here and it looks like it's going to be a good experience.

Entry 17

10 April 2011

Oh my god, it's over!!!! No more organizing people. No more begging people to crew for me. No more having an occasional actor tell me the day of shooting that they can't make it (that happened this morning). No more having equipment that I had had reserved for two weeks being suddenly given to someone who just walked in with a form that's supposed to be turned in at least 24 hours in advance (that happened two days ago). I shot several scenes from noon to 4p.m. at my parents house and then my last scene at 8:30p.m. here at my house. I can't believe that the film that I have been doing all semester is close to done. On top of that, this is my last journal entry which means that all I have to do is put all of the sections of my thesis together and then send it off. I feel like a huge weight has been lifted off of my shoulders. Unfortunately, when I think about how much editing I am going to have to do I start to feel that weight again.

However, I'm not going to despair. Two things down. Just got to edit the film, do the presentation, pass my classes, and graduate. This is actually looking possible.

End of Journal

I studied *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*, *The Women*, *Grand Canyon*, and *The Office* as creative works that could help me with my own film. I used several supporting sources to study the writers, directors, characters, and dialogue in each of these works. I also kept a journal in order to document my personal experiences and what I learned while working on this project. It is said that writers should write about what they know, which is very similar to the David Mamet quote above. This is a bit of advice that I stuck to. There were a lot of people who asked me why I did not make one of my main characters male or why I did not have one of my main characters be an adult, non-traditional student. I responded quite honestly that while such students certainly had very important experiences, they were not experiences I could relate to and therefore, not do justice to. Writing about young women going through college is easy for me to relate to because I experienced a lot of the same things as did my friends. Even my actresses and my actors all expressed to me how much they connected with their characters. It is my goal that all women and men will be able to relate to my characters and their experiences while realizing the importance of their relationships to help them get through life.

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